



When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963),  
President of the United States of America  
(1961–63)

ideas

poems

emotions

Asia-Pacific  
region

Indigenous

culture

experience

# POETIC VOICES

POETIC VOICES

## Chapter overview

Of all the forms of human expression, words are arguably the most important. They allow us to communicate our personal ideas, our problems, our concerns, our joys and our hopes. In this chapter we will look at the most complicated, and yet most simple, form of writing, the poem.

Poetry has a long and distinguished history that extends from the very dawn of language across time, across continents and across cultural barriers. This chapter explores how humanity has used words to express universal human ideas. While the form and the symbols used in poems may change with time and fashion, the emotions and concerns that they deal with remain the same.

We will look at poetry from indigenous peoples from around the Asia-Pacific Rim. In addition, we will explore the poetry created by Australian Indigenous peoples.

# 1 Indigenous voices



For thousands of years people have sought ways to express their thoughts and feelings. From Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics to medieval scripts etched by monks; from Kabuki theatre in Japan through to the creation of the latest Hollywood blockbuster, cultures throughout the world have endeavoured to express their views in a variety of ways. Poetry is one such way.

The rich diversity of experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples is reflected in the assortment of poetry that they have produced. From the urban dwellers to those living in remote communities, Indigenous poets have continued to speak in their own voice, from their own experience and their own hearts.

**Writer's TOOLBOX** The word 'indigenous' means 'native to, or originating from, a particular area'.

## Analysing the rich tapestry of experience: STEP UP

Deconstructing poetry relies on your ability to look for meaning and poetic devices in a poem, but it also asks you how you feel about the poem and what you think the purpose was in its construction. STEP UP is an acronym that should help you remember how to deconstruct and discuss a poem.

- S—Subject matter**  
The subject matter is the underlying content of the poem. You should identify this in your opening paragraph.
- T—Theme**  
The theme of the poem is the message that the poem conveys to the reader. Is it the injustice of

- war? Is it the tragedy of unrequited love? Does the poem explore the destruction of the environment?
- E—Emotions**  
Many poems engage the emotions of the reader in order to draw the reader into the subject matter. Poets often use imagery and other poetic devices, such as metaphors and similes, to invite this emotional response.
- P—Poetic devices**  
Looking at how poetic devices have been used is important. It helps you understand the images that the poet wants to create and the meaning that they want to convey.
- U—U (you)**  
This element of poetry deconstruction demands your response. How are you as the reader meant to feel about the poem?
- P—Purpose**  
The purpose of a poem is the reason why the poem was written.

**Writer's TOOLBOX**

A **simile** is a figure of speech comparing two different things. They are introduced by the words 'like' or 'as'. For example, 'Molly was as slow as a snail'. Molly is being compared to a snail.

A **metaphor** is also used to compare two things, but does not use the words 'like' or 'as'. If we change the example above to 'Molly is a snail', it becomes a metaphor.

## How to write a poetic deconstruction

Read the poem through more than once. The first time should be to see how the poem makes you feel and to understand what the poem is about. During the second reading you should look for meaning, poetic devices, themes and emotions. Once you have completed these steps, you are ready to start.

Read the following poem by Hyllus Noel Maris.

### DID YOU KNOW...

Hyllus Noel Maris (1934–1984), founder of Worawa Aboriginal College, was a leader and visionary whose initiatives in Aboriginal education included the establishment in 1983 of Worawa College, the first registered secondary college for Aboriginals in Victoria.



At the opening Hyllus stated '... in this, the first Aboriginal school in Victoria, the educational curriculum has been specially designed to suit Aboriginal students to bring them to their full potential ... Formal studies at secondary level will include English, Mathematics, Science, Current Affairs, History, Geography, Languages, Domestic Science, Business Management, Art/Craft, Music and Physical Education ... Aboriginal culture will be imparted not only as a school subject in each class's timetable but as an integral part of everyday life at the school ...'

### SPIRITUAL SONG OF THE ABORIGINE

By Hyllus Noel Maris

The repetition of 'I am' and 'I'm' emphasises the poet's connection to her ancestry.

The word 'Chanting' suggests a religious dimension to the experience; and the connection between the land and the people is again stressed.

First person pronouns—'I', 'My'—reiterate the connection to the land and to the poet's people.

There is a direct parallel between the red of the earth and the red of her blood. This again draws attention to the poet's connection to the land.

This phrase draws attention to the connection that many Aboriginal people have to the land. It suggests both an ancient connection and an unending connection to the land.

Maris reminds us that Aboriginal people were here for a long time before Europeans arrived. The reminder about the other species also serves as a subtle reminder of how unique these animals are and hence, how unique Australia is.

I am a child of the Dreamtime people

Part of this land like the gnarled gum tree

I am the river softly singing

Chanting our songs on the way to the sea

My spirit is the dust devils

Mirages that dance on the plains

I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain

I'm part of the rocks and the red desert earth

Red as the blood that flows in my veins

I am eagle, crow and snake that glides

Through the rain forests that cling to the mountainside

I awakened here when the earth was new ...

There was emu, wombat, kangaroo

No other man of 'differen' hue!

I am this land and this land is me

I am Australia.

Source: Hyllus Noel Maris

The poem's message can be summed up in these lines.

Highlighting the age of the tree connects the land with the people.

The alliteration creates a sense of peace and tranquillity.

Personification of dancing builds on the earlier image of singing. Both images suggest joy and happiness.

The word 'glides' suggests an effortless movement. This mirrors the earlier image of the river that made its way to the sea.

In drawing attention to these native animals that are also at home in the Australian environment, the poet emphasises her connection to the land and to the animals.

The full breadth of the Australian environment—deserts, rivers, snow, rainforests—is mentioned, giving further weight to the poet's claim of kinship with the land in all its facets.



Now that you have analysed the poem, use STEP UP to frame your response. Read the following example and look at the ways in which this student has used STEP UP to frame their response.

A **rhyming scheme** is indicated by letters given to each line. Those with a similar rhyme are given the same letter. For example:

I am a child of the Dreamtime people	A
Part of this land, like the gnarled gum tree	B
I am the river, softly singing	C
Chanting on our songs on my way to the sea	B
My spirit is the dust-devils	D
Mirages, that dance on the plain	E
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain	E

### Student response

The opening lines identify the poet, the title of the poem and the subject matter (Step up).

Written by Indigenous poet, Hyllus Noel Maris, 'Spiritual Song of the Aborigine' explores the way in which many Aboriginal people identify closely with the land. In particular, she reflects on the way that this spiritual connection is rooted in her people's long affinity and history.

Step up

From the very start of the poem, Maris establishes her heritage—'I am a child of the Dreamtime people.' She is also quick to establish that she is 'part of this land.' This awareness is conveyed as something delightful or admirable through the use of alliteration when she speaks of the 'gnarled gum' and the 'river softly singing.'

Step up

Step up

Maris encourages us to admire this long association of her people with the land. This is achieved through the use of personification as she talks of her 'spirit ... that dances.' She encourages us to see this connection by identifying all the places that her spirit dances 'snow ... wind ... rain ...

Step up

Step up

Since a full quote is not being used, an ellipsis (...) indicates that words have been removed from the quote.

rocks ... desert'. Having identified the ways in which this attachment is achieved, she asserts that it is these connections that foster her belief that the 'red desert earth ... [is] the blood that flows in [her] veins.' Maris further entwines her spirit with the land by highlighting her union with Australian animals such as 'eagle[s], crow[s] and snake[s]'; and the attachment to the land and all its creatures is clear.

Step up

Words added to a quote are put in square brackets [ ].

Finally, Maris draws attention to the timeless nature of this union. This association began when she 'awakened here when the earth was new / There was emu, wombat and kangaroo.' Similarly, she identifies that this bond occurred long before the arrival of Europeans (no other man of a different hue). Finally, Maris concludes her poem with the observation 'I am this land / And this land is me' to remind us of what she first observed in the second line of the poem. Thus, having traced this long connection, she can rightly conclude, 'I am Australian.'

The forward slash indicates the line break from the poem.

Step up

## Breakaway tasks

### Analysing

- In the poem, find examples of the following poetic devices. Write the examples in your notebook and decide what effect each device has on the poem.
  - alliteration
  - metaphor
  - personification
  - simile
- Throughout the poem, Maris emphasises the connection between Aboriginal people and nature. Why do you think she has chosen this approach?
- Explain the metaphor 'I am this land. And this land is me'.

The poem 'The Tribal Ghost' by Kevin Gilbert uses rhyme and rhythm to communicate a definite message about Indigenous identities. You might like to read the poem aloud in order to hear the patterns.

### THE TRIBAL GHOST

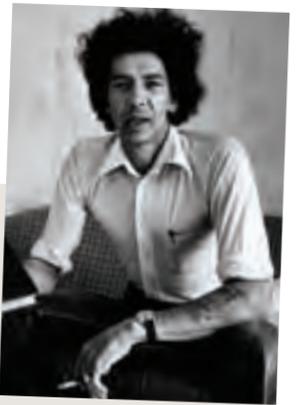
By Kevin Gilbert

He walks at Yarralumla,  
 'Neath the shining Southern Cross  
 An his fingers, stern, accusing  
 Point out his country's loss.  
 His features faintly glowing  
 In a deeply spectred light,  
 A silent voice just crying  
 'Guv'nor General' through the night.  
 He walks at Yarralumla  
 And his mournful features plead  
 For the Koori men, his brothers  
 Seeking justice in their need.  
 But the empty symbols, wooden  
 With a wooden heart look on:  
 'You must bow to hypocrisy  
 And injustice, so walk on!  
 Walk on! I take no heeding  
 To the spirit of the land,  
 Nor your silent, ghostly pleading,  
 Nor your stern but harmless hand  
 Your cry for land and totems  
 From the distant misty age  
 Your pleas for right and dignity  
 Your proud, but futile rage!  
 He walks at Yarralumla  
 And we know he walks in vain  
 There, forever silent, pleading,  
 For his tribal lands again—  
 Here the gaunt, embittered vision  
 Holding hands up to the skies  
 Will sink to deep oblivion  
 When the last old tribesman dies.

Source: Kevin Gilbert

### DID YOU KNOW...

Kevin Gilbert (1933–1993) was an Indigenous Australian poet. Well known as a poet and Aboriginal activist in Australia, he overcame a difficult childhood to become a writer. His works include *Because a White Man'll Never Do It* and *Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert*. He was the recipient of a number of different awards, including a National Book Council award and a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Human Rights Award for Literature.



**Yarralumla:** This is the official residence in Canberra of the Australian Governor-General. The Governor-General is the British monarch's representative in Australia.  
**Koori:** An Aboriginal person of southern New South Wales and Victoria. This term is specific to the Indigenous people of these regions.



## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 How do we know that the ghost is visiting the Governor-General's residence at night?
- 2 Why has the ghost come to Yarralumla? What is he hoping to achieve?
- 3 The ghost is clearly dissatisfied. Explain which words and images help to convey this?

### Applying

- 4 In the poem 'The Tribal Ghost' identify:
  - examples of personification
  - lines in which imagery is used
  - evidence of symbolism
  - phrases in which descriptive language is used.

### Analysing

- 5 The word 'But' signals a change in mood in the tone of the poem. It is at this point in the poem that the focus shifts from the ghost to the voice of the Governor-General. How does Gilbert portray this figure as an aloof and dismissive authority figure?
- 6 In what ways are the ghost's demands dismissed?
- 7 'He walks at Yarralumla / And we know he walks in vain'. Who is the 'we' that the poet refers to in this line? What makes you think this?

### Evaluating

- 8 Does Gilbert's poem suggest that the ghost's endeavours will be futile? Give reasons for your answer.
- 9 'But the empty symbols, wooden / with a wooden heart look on'. The role of Governor-General is a typical representation of the role of white authority in Australia. What does the use of these lines say to the reader about the way in which this authority views the demands of the ghost?

'No Disgrace' is by Coralie Cassady, who wrote *Poetic Perspective* and *Proper Deadly Poetry*. It gives an insight into the world of Indigenous Australians living in Australia today. Her aim has been to explore aspects of Aboriginal life and give non-Indigenous people a glimpse into modern Indigenous Australian culture.



## NO DISGRACE

By Coralie Cassady

POEM

There is no disgrace,  
So proudly show your Aboriginal face.  
Once upon a time,  
We Aborigines were regarded as small-time.  
But positive happenings for Aborigines,  
Are beginning to brilliantly shine.  
Aborigines, you are doing it just fine.  
We have been constantly put down,  
Messed around,  
But our Aboriginal culture still strongly abounds.  
Who is now having the last laugh?  
One thing's for sure,  
Aborigines don't do things by half.  
Internationally recognized Aboriginal band,  
Yothu Yindi,  
Sing to the world,  
About our heritage, misery and loss of land.  
Aboriginal paintings adorn many walls.  
We have picked ourselves up,  
Since our two hundred years ago fall.  
We are definitely making our own tracks,  
We are no longer considered as 'myall blacks'.

Source: Coralie Cassady

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 In what ways does the poet suggest that Aborigines / are beginning to brilliantly shine?

### Applying

- 2 What is the reference to the band Yothu Yindi? Go to **Pearson Reader** to explore what this band did for race relations in the 1990s.

### Analysing

- 3 Mark the rhyming pattern of the poem. How do the rhythms and rhymes of the poem affect the way in which it is read?
- 4 What effect is achieved by the use of the single lines?

### Evaluating

- 5 Compare Cassady's poem with the poem by Gilbert. In what ways are they similar or different? Provide examples to illustrate your point of view.

## DID YOU KNOW...

Yothu Yindi is a band made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members.

## Song lyrics

One other way in which people express themselves is through music. Some of the most powerful words ever written came through words intended to be sung. Whether they are devotional hymns, folk tunes, operettas or the songs of rock and roll, words and music have always gone together. As a form of expression, some Indigenous people have also found a voice through their song lyrics.

Inducted into the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) Hall of Fame in 2009, Kev Carmody (1946-) has had a diverse career. Carmody's father was of Irish descent and his mother was an Indigenous Murri woman. Born in Cairns, Queensland in 1946, he has worked as a welder, a drover and a shearer. At the age of 33, he enrolled in University, completing a degree in History. It was not until 1989 that he released his first album.

## ABOUT KEV CARMODY

Music had always been around him. As a child he listened to old records on the family's wind-up 78 machine, absorbed everything from country music to classical from an old valve wireless, and spent many nights singing folk and popular songs around the campfire. He did not, and still does not see himself as 'a musician' in the way that most popular musicians see themselves. Still the influences upon him were powerful and profound.



Carmody's initial inspiration came from a truly rural, oral tradition. Both his Irish father and Murri mother came from powerful oral traditions. Carmody still talks about the stories and songs he was told and taught by his Murri grandparents and his extended Murri family of uncles, aunts and cousins.

Source: Carmody's official website, 2011

Read the following Carmody songs on this page and the next and answer the questions that follow each.

## TRAVELLIN' NORTH

By Kev Carmody

SONG

Travellin' north ... beyond that border  
Them black clouds is higher than the sky  
Travellin' back in time, right across that borderline  
Thunder lightning come, cloud begin to cry  
Storm rain come. cloud begin to cry

Journeyin' north to the country of my childhood  
That scrub country where we and us was raised  
Where the Moonie River's etched a track through  
Every floodgate fence  
A track no human construct can ever reverse or erase  
Where human constructs are just a passin' phase

That ragin' storm beats hard upon that border  
Still 200 miles of rainin' road to go  
Steadily the road climbs across that Wallangarra line  
The rainin' darkness encompasses my soul  
These memories are just one curse of growin' old.

Source: Kev Carmody

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Where is the writer travelling to?
- 2 What are the weather conditions like?

### Analysing

- 3 Track the way in which the storm is mentioned throughout the song. How does Carmody create a sense of menace about it?
- 4 In the second stanza how does Carmody convey the idea that nature is more powerful than human influence?
- 5 What effect is achieved by shortening words (ragin', rainin') as Carmody sometimes does in this song?
- 6 What evidence is there in the song that suggests that the storm has made him sad?
- 7 What is Carmody's message in this song?

### Evaluating

- 8 Use the STEP UP strategy to complete an analysis of this song.

## MOONSTRUCK

By Kev Carmody

SONG

When the western sky's ablaze  
And the sun lays down to rest  
When the curlew starts to cry  
And the birds fly home to roost  
When the full moon begins to rise  
Satin moon beams on my face  
Beauty of the night goes far beyond  
Far beyond both time and place

No ones lost who finds the moon  
Or the sweetness of the wattle's bloom  
Rebirth with the rain in spring  
Or the dingoe's howl on the autumn wind  
Spirit of the moon here calls me home  
Spirit of the moon here guides me home

Moon it draws me to the scrub  
Night voices raised in song  
Past the water lilies bloom  
In that tranquil billabong  
Walkin' on the shadowed leaves  
That are reflected by the moon  
To the rocks and hills an' caves  
Where the dingoes' pups are born

Stars ablazin' across the sky  
In the brilliance of the Milky Way  
I'm surrounded by the beauty  
Of every night and every day  
Walkin' towards that morning moon set  
Caress of moonlight on my skin  
Knowin' that freedom of not carin'  
Of why I'm goin' or where I've been

Source: Kev Carmody

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 In the first stanza how has Carmody created a feeling of peace and serenity?
- 2 When does Carmody feel most contemplative about home?

### Analysing

- 3 'Beauty of the night goes far beyond / Far beyond both time and place' How do these lines suggest that Carmody has moved into a sense of reverie?
- 4 The moon is central to the songwriter's journey. How is the moon used by Carmody to explore the ideas in the song?

## Strands in action

### Core tasks

- 1 Go to **Pearson Reader** to find examples of the lyrics of Indigenous artists. Some artists you might consider include the Warumpi band, Kev Carmody, Torres Strait Islander artist Christine Anu, Jessica Mauboy, Archie Roach, Tiddas, Yothu Yindi and hip hop band Tjimba and the Yung Warriors. When you have selected a song that you find engaging, use STEP UP to deconstruct it. Present your findings to the class.
- 2 Research a story of the Dreaming which represents part of the Indigenous Australian culture. Try to locate some images that are related to the story. Present the story as a poem, and use the images to support a public reading of your poem.



Web Destination

### Extra tasks

- 1 Compare and contrast two of the poems in this module. Present your ideas as a table or a Venn diagram.
- 2 Produce an artwork that represents your interpretation of one of the poems in this section.
- 3 Invite an Indigenous Australian to talk about how Indigenous poetry is an expression of identity. It could be another student, a member of staff or a guest invited to the school.
- 4 Write your own poem exploring the connection between Indigenous Australians and the land. Use symbols, icons or imagery in your poem to help you express your ideas. Be careful not to copy indigenous art. These images are copyright and should not be reproduced.
- 5 Research Indigenous Australian poems. Choose one, then present the poem in a digital or visual format accompanied by music or sound effects.

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## Our neighbours' voices

As we have seen, the Indigenous peoples of Australia have used poetry as one medium to express their feelings about modern and ancient Australia. In the same way, our neighbours, the people of the Asia-Pacific region have been using the poetic form for many generations. Many indigenous peoples developed a strong oral tradition to tell and retell the stories of their culture. As time progressed and other cultural influences came to their shores, these stories were written down in native and introduced languages (such as English) so that they could be transmitted to the young members of all the different cultural groups.

In a world that is being made to feel smaller through immediate communication and instant interaction it is becoming more and more important for Australians to listen to the concerns and issues of our neighbours. One of the unifying factors between diverse nations is this ability to express and explore universal ideas in oral and written language.

## New Zealand

When Australians talk about the spirit of ANZAC we are making reference, not just to the bravery of the Australian Diggers, but also to that of the New Zealand soldiers who fought alongside them. New Zealand is acknowledged as a country of great beauty (see the *Lord of the Rings* films if you need convincing). Maoris call New Zealand 'Aotearoa', meaning 'Land of the Long White Cloud' and this phrase appears often in their poems and lyrics. It is also, however, a country with a history of conquest much like our own and the poetry and songs reflect the battles and hardships that result from such a heritage.



You will notice that many of the poems in this section do not rhyme, or have a regular rhythm. This type of poetry is called **free verse**. Free verse is a very ancient form of writing that relies on such elements as repetition of words or phrases, rather than on a more artificial, or highly worked, scheme of metre and rhyme.





## Nature

Maori culture focuses on nature and much of the emphasis is on using song to tell stories. Many traditional songs and poetry explore the ocean and its power. This section from a Maori song talks to the god of the sea.

The Maori tradition of song, poetry and storytelling was recognised by the white settlers as being important and many examples were collected and translated into English. Some words, therefore, reflect the language of the translator rather than the author, and some words have been inserted to clarify meaning for an unfamiliar audience.

### MAORI SONG

The tide of life glides swiftly past  
And mingles all in one great eddying foam.  
O Heaven, now sleeping! rouse thee, rise to power.  
And O thou Earth; awake, exert thy might for me,  
And open wide the door to my last home,  
Where calm and quiet rest awaits me in the sky.'

reference to the ocean

reference to the gods

reference to death

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 Find definitions for the words 'eddying', 'rouse' and 'exert'. What other words could have been used instead? What happens to the meaning of the poem if you substitute antonyms in place of these words?
- 2 What is the effect of the use of 'thee' and 'thy'? What do you think these words translate to in our language today?
- 3 What are the major influences on Maori life according to the Maori Song?

### Analysing

- 4 Identify a metaphor that is used in the poem. Use your STEP UP skills to explain why it is used and what effect it has.
- 5 There are several examples of personification in the Maori Song. Use your STEP UP skills to explain why they are used and what effect they have.

### Creating

- 6 Imagine that the Maori Song is being used as the basis of a new advertising campaign for New Zealand tourism. Firstly you need to set the poem to music or record it being spoken. Then design a series of three or four storyboards that encompass the images you would use to illustrate the key ideas of the song.

## The haka

The haka is a key part of Maori social custom and is used to welcome guests, entertain visitors and to intimidate opponents. It is mostly performed by men, with women providing backing vocals. The most famous of the Maori songs about warfare and battles is the Ka Mate which has an accompanying stylised dance. This haka is showcased to the world through its performance before the major sporting events in which New Zealand teams are participating. The Maori version and the English translation follow.

### MAORI VERSION OF THE HAKA

Ka mate! ka mate! ka ora! ka ora!  
Ka mate! ka mate! ka ora! ka ora!  
Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru  
Nana nei i tiki mai whakawhiti te ra  
A, upane! ka upane!  
A, upane, ka upane, whiti te ra!

### ENGLISH VERSION OF THE HAKA

'Tis death! 'tis death! (or: I may die) 'Tis life! 'tis life!  
(or: I may live)  
'Tis death! 'tis death! 'Tis life! 'tis life!  
This the hairy man that stands here ...  
who brought the sun and caused it to shine  
A step upward, another step upward!  
A step upward, another ... the sun shines!

### DID YOU KNOW...

'The hairy man' refers to a friendly chief who saved the Maori chief, Te Rauparaha. It was Te Rauparaha who then composed the haka. He describes his rescuer as his saviour because he brought the sun and caused it to shine, therefore saving him from certain death. The song is sung in an aggressive fashion in order to intimidate opponents in battle (or in the way it is used today—in sporting encounters).

In traditional Maori ceremony, the faces of the dancers are often tattooed with traditional markings. This form of marking celebrates the culture and identity of the Maori people.

## Breakaway tasks

### Analysing

- 1 What key idea is expressed about Maori culture in the line 'who brought the sun and caused it to shine'?
- 2 What do you think the line 'A step upward, another step upward!' means?
- 3 What reason would there be for repetition in this poem?

### Creating

- 4 Research the haka on the internet. Find examples of hakas that are performed for other purposes (such as those already outlined) and share them with your class.
- 5 See if you can find any other examples of poems or songs that have been sung as inspiration for those going into battle or to intimidate an opponent.
- 6 What effect would it have if the haka was sung to a peaceful melody? Try changing the rhythm and the tone and in small groups sing the haka. Once each group has performed their haka, reflect on the exercise and how this may or may not have changed the meaning.

## Love

Using poetry to express your feelings about love is a world-wide habit! Whether love poems are used to share the joy of a love affair, or the pain of a lost love, or to criticise a lover, they appear in every culture. This poem is a traditional Maori poem about a young girl who has lost her lover.

### THE DESERTED GIRL'S LAMENT

Traditional

With quivering limbs  
And bowed head I weep,  
And restlessly turn on  
My lonely sleeping-mat  
Once fondly I dreamed  
Your love ne'er would wane.  
Ah me! it is dead;  
But mine ceaselessly burns.  
Swamp-stains on the feet  
Are washed clean in the stream,  
But the heart-stains of love  
For ever remain.

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 What voice is the poem written in?
- 2 What is the subject matter of the poem?
- 3 What is the purpose of writing the poem?
- 4 What is a lament? What synonyms are there for this word?

### Analysing

- 5 What theme is explored in the poem?
- 6 How does the poet attract and maintain the interest of the audience?
- 7 What lines in the poem tell us about the kind of life the girl has? How do they do this?
- 8 Write a STEP UP analysis of this poem.

### Creating

- 9 What do you think has happened to sour the love affair between the two young lovers? Write a short story that provides an introduction to the girl's lament poem.

## Hawaii

Like Australia and New Zealand, Hawaii has a link to Captain James Cook and 'the Age of Pacific Discovery'. What Cook found in the place he called 'the Sandwich Islands' was a thriving and ancient culture that had a distinct oral poetry tradition.

One of the biggest challenges that face a culture, however, is loss of the native language. Language is one of the main ways that people express their culture. When people are forced to use an alien language, as the Hawaiian people have been, it becomes even more important to assert cultural identity. While this tradition has, as a result, ebbed and flowed over the intervening centuries, the Hawaiian tradition of *Kanaka Maoli* or Native Hawaiian poetry celebrates life, death and love in the islands.

### DID YOU KNOW...

Captain James Cook was killed on the Hawaiian Islands in 1779 as he was returning to England to report his discoveries.

## Love of country

One of the traditional forms used by Hawaiian poets is the hula. In these often short pieces poets expressed their love for their native land. In the following traditional piece, the author shares their love for the island of Kauai.

### HANOHANO KAUA`I

Traditional

Famed is Kaua`i in the calm  
Smooth the sea on the leeward side  
It seems to be wooing the rain clouds  
And the misty rain over the plain

Raising the leaves of the small leafed rose  
And the ferns that lie in the cold mountain

It is a long way to go in search of the lover  
Till he is found at the sea of Keawe iki  
I am the small breadfruit tree of Lele  
With the papala gums to snare the birds

Freely given when horizon clouds nest  
With all rich delicacies of Kapu`ukolo

Tell the refrain  
Lovely Kauai stands forth in the calm  
Tell the refrain again, for the last time  
Famed is Kauai in the calm

### DID YOU KNOW...

Hawaii became the fiftieth state of the United States of America in 1959 after a long, and at times bitter, campaign to achieve statehood.



Wailua Falls, Kaua'i, Hawaii

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 What do the words 'leeward' and 'horizon' mean?
- 2 How is the author building a picture of Kauai as an island?
- 3 What image of Kauai is being proposed in the final stanza?
- 4 Find the meanings of the following: breadfruit, Lele, Kapu`ukolo.

### Analysing

- 5 What does the author want the reader to believe about Kauai at the end of the poem? How do we know this?
- 6 Find two examples of personification in the poem and write a paragraph explaining how they work and why the author may have chosen to use them. How do they add to the message of the poem?

## China

In China, poetry was a creative skill that was highly regarded. The poetry itself was carefully crafted and polished, often to show how talented and knowledgeable the poet was. Some of the earliest rhyming poetry is from China, although much of it we only know of through reputation as the originals have been destroyed. The subjects, however, remain those of every other poet—they cover the love of a father for

his daughter, political commentaries, odes to nature and to the sea.

## Paternal love

The following poem from Wei Ying Wu (737–792) from China reflects the customs of the time in which the poem was written. Living during the Tang dynasty, Wei Ying Wu wrote poems that were heavily influenced by nature and other Chinese inspirational poets such as Tao Qian and Xie Lingyun. Perhaps the most striking thing about Wei Ying Wu's poetry is the way that, even now, it speaks to us directly. His concerns are *human* concerns and although the circumstances have changed, the emotions he conveys have not.

This poem is highly emotive. It draws on a father's conflicting emotions as he says goodbye to his daughter before her marriage. His pride in the person she has become is contrasted with his sadness at losing his daughter to her husband and his family. Ideals of respect and obedience exist in many poems from Asian cultures and are present in this poem.

### TO MY DAUGHTER ON HER MARRIAGE INTO THE YANG FAMILY

By Wei Ying Wu

My heart has been heavy all day long  
Because you have so far to go.  
The marriage of a girl, away from her parents,  
Is the launching of a little boat on a great river.  
... You were very young when your mother died,  
Which made me the more tender of you.  
Your elder sister has looked out for you,  
And now you are both crying and cannot part.  
This makes my grief the harder to bear;  
Yet it is right that you should go.  
... Having had from childhood no mother to guide you,  
How will you honour your mother-in-law?  
It's an excellent family; they will be kind to you,  
They will forgive you your mistakes—  
Although ours has been so pure and poor  
That you can take them no great dowry.  
Be gentle and respectful, as a woman should be,  
Careful of word and look, observant of good example.  
... After this morning we separate,  
There's no knowing for how long ...  
I always try to hide my feelings—  
They are suddenly too much for me,  
When I turn and see my younger daughter  
With the tears running down her cheek.

Source: Wei Ying Wu

### DID YOU KNOW...

The earliest known collection of Chinese poetry is the Book of Songs or *Shih Ching*. The book contains 305 poems some of which may date from as early as 1000 BCE. The odes make use of imagery and cover a range of subjects including love, death, war, marriage, farming and the ruler.

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Why is the father worried about his daughter's relationship with her mother-in-law?
- 2 Is the family wealthy? How do we know?

### Analysing

- 3 What is the father really talking about when he says that the daughter has 'so far to go'?
- 4 Find examples of poetic devices in the poem and then use STEP UP to explore their effectiveness.

### Evaluating

- 5 Go to **Pearson Places** to find some of the poetry of Tao Qian and Xie Lingyun. What does this poetry say about China and the topics that Chinese poets felt were important?



Web Destination

## Nature

Even in the eighth century man was able to reflect on the beauty that surrounded him and write evocatively of his world. The following poem by Wei Ying Wu is a simple reflection about mooring his boat for the night and the serenity of the natural world he encounters.

### MOORING AT TWILIGHT IN YUYI DISTRICT

By Wei Ying Wu

Furling my sail near the town of Huai,  
I find for harbour a little cove  
Where a sudden breeze whips up the waves.  
The sun is growing dim now and sinks in the dusk.  
People are coming home. The bright mountain-peak darkens.  
Wildgeese fly down to an island of white weeds.  
... At midnight I think of a northern city-gate,  
And I hear a bell tolling between me and sleep.

Source: Wei Ying Wu

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 How does the poet create mood in the poem? What words does he use to convey the idea of evening?
- 2 What is the effect of the 'bell tolling' in the last line? What does it remind us of?
- 3 The poem is almost a series of statements. What effect does this have on the reader? What does it make us feel?

### Creating

- 4 Change the setting of the poem to a modern city—perhaps you have just entered your hotel room after a long journey. Now rewrite the poem to reflect the change in scene and century.
- 5 What topics would you cover if you were to write a series of short poems on daily life in the twenty-first century? Make a list of what you would write about.

## Korea

Korea is an Asian nation with which Australia has many links. Ko Un (1933–) is one of Korea's most prominent poets. He has produced more than 150 volumes of poetry and other writings. His poetry vividly reflects not only his personal life, but the Korean people's recent history. A Buddhist monk for ten years in his twenties, Ko Un witnessed the brutality of the Korean War (1950–53). In later years he was a leading opponent of dictatorship and was often arrested. His poem 'Sunlight' reflects his experience in prison 1980–82. It depicts brutal harshness being broken by a glimmer of hope. One of Ko Un's most celebrated poems, it has been translated several times in different versions.

## SUNLIGHT

By Ko Un

I really don't know what to do.  
Let me swallow my spit,  
and my adversity, too.  
An honored visitor is coming  
to my tiny cell with its north-facing window.  
It's not the chief making his rounds,  
but a gleam of sunlight for a moment late in the  
afternoon,  
a gleam no bigger than a square of folded pasteboard.  
I'm going crazy; it's first love.  
I hold out the palm of my hand,  
warm the toes of a shy, bared foot.  
As I bend low  
and extend my unreligious, gaunt face,  
that scrap of sunlight all too quickly slips away.  
After the guest has left beyond the bars,  
the room feels several times colder and darker.  
This special cell in a military prison is a photographer's  
darkroom.  
Without sunlight I laughed like an idiot.  
One day it was a coffin holding a corpse.  
One day it was altogether the sea.  
Amazing! A few people have survived here.

Being alive is also a sea without a single sail in sight.

Source: Ko Un, translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé  
& Lee Sang-Wha

## Breakaway tasks

### Understanding

- 1 Identify the poetic devices that Ko Un uses in his poem. Provide examples of each one.
- 2 Which words does the poet use to help the reader feel the barren coldness of the prison cell?

### Analysing

- 3 The poet leads us to believe that the sunlight is a guest to the cell. In what way does the poet use personification to help us understand this?
- 4 What are the different images Un provides of his prison cell. Which do you find the most effective?
- 5 What do you think this poem is actually about? What major theme is Un developing here?

## Vietnam

One of the great tragedies of war is the upheaval and displacement that it causes to survivors. The Vietnam War (1965–75) was one of the most brutal and violent wars of the twentieth century. The loss of millions of lives and the devastation the war had on the land and the people of Vietnam has been felt for generations afterwards.

In the late 1940s and 1950s the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian people fought a war of Independence against France which was the colonial power when the Second World War broke out in 1939. Japanese forces invaded the country and many French people fled. The people of French Indochina, as the area was called, did not want the French to return after the war. In 1954 the French were defeated and French Indochina was divided into Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Vietnam itself was divided into the Communist North and the South. Fighting broke out between North and South Vietnam.

The United States of America and other countries, not wanting South Vietnam to become Communist, committed large numbers of troops in the Vietnam War in the early 1960s. In the 1970s America began withdrawing troops and left Vietnam altogether in 1973. Two years later the North won the war and the country was united.

Many people who had fought against the communists or who were critical of the new government were sent to re-education camps where they endured terrible hardships and were brainwashed into accepting the new communist manifesto.

Fearful of reprisals from the communists, many people fled the country in secret. Some of these people escaped on small fishing boats that were ill-equipped for ocean voyages. Leaving everything behind, their hope was to start new lives in other countries such as Australia.



## AFTER THE WAR

By Võ Hồng Chương-Dài

After the war  
After they took over the city  
After they sent your husband  
to jail for fighting  
After you lost  
your home  
and furniture shop  
After you had to sell pickles  
and coffee  
for a living  
After your children  
said Uncle Hô died for you  
After your husband returned  
with a head of leftover hair  
and your daughter didn't recognize him  
After you sold the earrings  
your husband gave you  
on your wedding day  
After you bought  
passage for him  
to escape  
on a fishing boat  
After you  
your parents  
your children  
escaped  
Did you look back?

Source: Võ Hồng Chương-Dài



## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Who is Võ Chương-Đài writing to?
- 2 What are some of the things that the narrator has lost?

### Understanding

- 3 Why was the narrator's husband sent to jail?
- 4 Why did the narrator start selling pickles and coffee?
- 5 How did the narrator fund the escape of her husband?

### Analysing

- 6 The line 'After your children / said Uncle Hô died for you' passes without comment; that is, the poet makes neither a positive nor a negative observation about this incident. How does the poet imply that this moment caused the narrator distress?
- 7 What has happened to the husband in the re-education camp to cause his daughter not to recognise him?
- 8 There is only one punctuation mark in the poem. Does this affect the way in which we read the poem?
- 9 What effect is achieved on the reader through the repetition of the word, 'after' throughout the poem?
- 10 What other words are repeated throughout the poem? Why do you think the poet deliberately structures her work in this way?
- 11 The final line is set apart from the rest of the poem and has a different tone to all that has preceded it. How does this add to the pathos of the piece?



**Pathos:** a feeling of pity or compassion

## Strands in action

### Core tasks

- 1 Develop a scrapbook of poems and images from the Asia-Pacific region. You could use a physical scrapbook, or you could maintain an electronic scrapbook using a program such as OneNote or PowerPoint. Make sure that you annotate each poem and write captions for each image so that you can be sure of their relevance.
- 2 Find a poem or song from an Asian-Pacific culture not represented in this text. Use STEP UP to guide you as you deconstruct the poem and draw links to the themes we have looked at through this chapter.
- 3 Write an essay that debates the statement 'That all poetry is the same'. Use the poems and ideas that you have discovered in this chapter as evidence for your thesis.
- 4 Write a poem in free verse that reflects on one of the ideas explored by poets in this chapter.

### Extra tasks

- 1 Design a poster to advertise a recital for one of the songs or poems in this section. Ensure that you use imagery from the poem in your illustration.
- 2 Write a poem that focuses on a belief or set of values that you or your family might have.
- 3 Choose a moment in history that you think should be commemorated in verse. Write a poem, in any style you wish to use, about that moment. You might like to pretend that you were there and are recording what you saw, smelt, heard or thought, that you are telling the story of the event or one participant in the event.